

V. National Register Status

Introduction

In 1972 a single national register nomination was prepared for East and West Potomac Parks. The focus of the approved 1972 nomination was on the continued use of the parks for recreation and for special event activities at the memorials and monuments, without reference to the significance of the two parks as designed landscapes. The nomination emphasized that the design intent of Potomac Park “to be . . . used as a park for the recreation and pleasure of the people” had been fulfilled. This may be true for East Potomac Park, but the original design intent for West Potomac Park was not exclusively based on recreation. Although the setting for the memorials and monuments is addressed minimally, little discussion on the influence of the L’Enfant Plan, McMillan Commission Plan, and other subsequent plans for West Potomac Park occurs. While the 1972 nomination lists structural features, such as monuments, memorials, and statues, landscape features that contribute to the character of the Lincoln Memorial grounds (Lincoln Memorial, Reflecting Pool, and Watergate areas) are not covered. A more comprehensive approach that addresses landscape issues relating design intent, circulation, vegetation, views, site furniture, and land use is needed. Because the approved 1972 national register nomination does not adequately address currently accepted criteria for the historic landscape, National Capital Parks Central and the National Capital Region offices are currently updating the nomination for East and West Potomac Parks. Information from this document and other cultural resource documents completed since 1972 will be used to include more specific information on the contributing landscape features.

Evaluation of Significance

According to *National Register Bulletin 18* (for nominating “designed historic landscapes”), a designed historic landscape is defined as a “landscape that has significance as a design or work of art; was consciously designed and laid out by a master gardener, landscape architect, architect, or horticulturist to a design principle. . . .” Based on research for the Lincoln Memorial grounds, the study area is a significant historic landscape.

There are two periods of significance for the landscape of the Lincoln Memorial. One period (1791-1914) includes the early development of Washington, D.C., the creation of parkland from the tidal flats of the Potomac River, and the work of the 1901-1902 McMillan Commission. The second period (1914-1933) is based on the design development, construction and completion of the Lincoln Memorial, and the surrounding grounds and features. Three additional periods (1933-1945, 1945-1970, and 1970-1996) have been documented as well. Each of these is characterized by NPS management of the site and by the incremental physical changes over time. Many of these changes have been the result of increases in tourism and automobile use and reflect the National Park Service’s efforts to deal with these issues. Of the two significant periods, the second is of primary significance as it had the most impact on the overall physical development and organization of the landscape.

The McMillan Commission was established to develop a comprehensive plan for the nation's capital. Basing their plan on an adaptation of Pierre L'Enfant's 1791 design for the federal city, the commission proposed extending the existing east-west mall axis to the west, beyond the Washington Monument to a new memorial to Abraham Lincoln. To achieve this effect, a long narrow pool delineated the land between the Washington Monument and the new memorial location. West of the memorial, a series of steps descended to the Potomac shoreline, creating a ceremonial watergate entrance to the city from the river. Near Watergate, a bridge to Arlington Memorial Cemetery spanned the Potomac and served to symbolically reunite the north and south. Although the conceptual designs of the McMillan Commission were never fully implemented, subsequent plans developed between 1914 and 1933 for the Lincoln Memorial and Arlington Memorial Bridge and for the pool between the memorial and the Washington Monument, incorporated many of the McMillan Commission's underlying ideas.

There are three distinct landscapes that comprise the Lincoln Memorial grounds: the Reflecting Pool area, the Lincoln Memorial circle and radial roads, and the Watergate area. In addition to the significance of the historic designed landscape, there are structures with significance in their own right. Furthermore, the relationship of the buildings and structural features with the designed landscape cannot be separated since they complement each other. Because of this, the Lincoln Memorial, Arlington Memorial Bridge, Watergate plaza and steps, Parkway Drive, and the Reflecting/Rainbow Pool are all considered contributing features to the historic landscape and are also significant as individual buildings and structures.

The study area for the Lincoln Memorial grounds are comprised of three different landscape types as defined by the national register for designed landscapes: *Monuments and Memorial Grounds* (Lincoln Memorial circle and radial roads and Reflecting Pool area), *Public Spaces* (Watergate steps and adjacent areas of West Potomac Park), and *Parkways* (Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway approach and Arlington Memorial Bridge as the connection to the George Washington Memorial Parkway).

As outlined in the national register program, a process of identification and evaluation is used to determine the significance of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects. The other way to assess a feature's attributes is by evaluating its integrity. Integrity is determined by the examination of the location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association of a feature. Before determining the integrity, the site must meet at least one of the following national register criteria for significance:

- associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history;
- associated with the lives of persons significant in our past;
- embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that

represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction;

- yielded or may be likely to yield information in prehistory or history.

The following is a more detailed discussion of the Lincoln Memorial grounds with respect to these four criteria.

Criterion A: Association with Events, Activities, or Trends

The Lincoln Memorial grounds have national significance because they are an essential part of the larger plan conceived by the McMillan Commission of 1901-1902. The commission's work marks the first comprehensive effort to showcase Washington D.C., the nations capital, in the construction of the civic buildings, improvement of the Mall, and the development of a park system. These aspects of the plan also represent one of the most successful implementations of the "City Beautiful Movement," the national movement for the planning of civic spaces inspired by the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. In addition to their significant design, the Lincoln Memorial grounds have gained national significance in the role they have played as a forum for racial justice starting in 1939 with the Marian Anderson concert, into the 1960s providing a backdrop for the civil rights movement, and continuing into the 1990s. The site also has local significance as part of a citywide park system for the Washington D.C. and in its connection to a regional parkway system, which includes Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and George Washington Memorial Parkway.

Criterion B: Association with an Important Individual

The Lincoln Memorial grounds are strongly associated with two important Americans. The first one is Abraham Lincoln, to whom the building and grounds serve as a memorial. The second individual is Martin Luther King Jr., who delivered his historic "I Have A Dream" speech from the steps of the memorial at the conclusion of the 1963 March on Washington.

Criterion C: Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a Type, Period, or Method of Construction, or Represent the Work of a Master

The formal symmetrical arrangement of the Lincoln Memorial grounds embodies the classicism of the Beaux Arts style found in the design of the memorial building. In addition to the great public park that was created around the Lincoln Memorial, peripheral areas were set aside for parkways and eventually developed for recreation. The Lincoln Memorial grounds were designed and subsequently developed under the direction of such noted landscape architects, architects, and engineers as Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., Charles McKim, Henry Bacon, James Greenleaf, and the U.S. Army Corps

of Engineers. As the landscape architect, Olmsted contributed the most and had the greatest influence on both the conception of the design and implementation of the Lincoln Memorial landscape through his service on the McMillan Commission , Commission of Fine Arts (1910-1918), National Capital Park Commission (1924-1926), and the National Capital Parks and Planning Commission (1926-1932). Charles McKim, architect, played a major role in the selection of the memorial site and in the earliest designs for the memorial bridge, when he served on the McMillan Commission. As the architect for the Lincoln Memorial, Henry Bacon continued to assert his ideas on the design of the building and its relationship to the setting during the course of his service on the Lincoln Memorial Commission (1912-1921), and on the Commission of Fine Arts (1921-1928). James Greenleaf, landscape architect, directed the design and implementation of the foundation plantings on the north, east and south sides of the Lincoln Memorial when he replaced Olmsted on the Commission in 1918. Greenleaf served in this position until 1927. As consulting landscape architect for the Arlington Memorial Bridge Commission, Greenleaf designed the planting plan for the west side of the Lincoln Memorial and for the Watergate area. The Army Corps of Engineers also exercised considerable influence over the site as a whole. Since dredging the Potomac and filling the “flats,” from which West Potomac Park was created, the Corps managed, supervised construction and prepared designs for Lincoln Memorial grounds. The Corps was also responsible for the implementation of plans and the care of buildings and public spaces in West Potomac Park until 1933.

Criterion D: Potential to yield information important to history or prehistory

All the land for the Lincoln Memorial grounds is reclaimed land from the Potomac River. Because of this, there is no archeological significance to the site.

Evaluation of Integrity

There are seven qualities that help to determine the integrity of the overall landscape. These are historic location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. By using each of these to determine the degree of integrity, we are able to assess whether this landscape had retained enough of its important features to convey its historical significance. Even though some modifications to paving materials and use have taken place around the memorial, the character (or setting), which is the most important element, has remained intact. As part of the character, the major features are: vegetation (arrangement and species selection), circulation patterns (both vehicular and pedestrian), structural features (the Lincoln Memorial, Reflecting Pool/Rainbow Pool, Watergate, and bridge and parkway approaches), the views (mall axis), and continued use of the landscape for commemoration and for passive recreation. Some changes in the past have adversely affected the integrity but not to the degree that the overall design intent has been seriously compromised. Where the major changes have occurred, it has generally been caused by the development of new road systems adjacent to the study boundaries (Independence Avenue and Theodore Roosevelt Bridge). In other areas, changes in use have had a greater impact on the resource, and if continued, could degrade the integrity of the landscape (French Drive concessionaire structures). In addition, the inconsistency of new materials and the inconsistency of types of site furniture used in the study area, where the design was intended to be simple and clean, undermine the integrity of the landscape. In most cases, these effects can be reversed so that the historic character of the Lincoln Memorial grounds is retained.